



Office of Research and Development
Department of Research, Evaluation and Assessment

***Saint Paul Public Schools
Early Kindergarten
2004-2005
Evaluation Report***

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Executive Summary

Saint Paul Public Schools is committed to implementing quality 4-year-old programs that are aligned with public schools for the purpose of increasing school readiness among children who come from families of high needs, and to increase the numbers of children who attend public schools. In 2004-05, eleven new half day Early Kindergarten (EK) programs were initiated serving a total of 367 children.

The evaluation of this program consists of several parts:

- Analysis of Work Sampling assessment data;
- Analysis of tracking of students from EK to Kindergarten;
- Parent Survey, and
- Focus Group discussion with teachers.

By the end of the year, 62% of children are proficient on the Work Sampling standards for 4-year-olds, and 35% are on their way to becoming proficient, according to checklists completed by EK teachers. Eighty percent of children who attended EK also enrolled in Kindergarten in Saint Paul Public Schools. According to surveys, parents were generally pleased with their children's experience in EK. Parents expressed concerns about transportation for children to schools and communication with teachers. Focus Group discussions with teachers produced numerous comments that can inform the current Project Early K program. Teachers had many ideas for effective classroom instruction and for alignment with the K-6 system.

Introduction

In September 2004, eleven new half day Early Kindergarten programs for 4-year-olds were launched in Saint Paul Public Schools. An evaluation of the program was planned with the intent of documenting the impact of the program, and to inform future projects. The evaluation addressed the following questions:

- What instructional practices did teachers use?
- What resources were most helpful for teachers?
- Was the professional development helpful for teachers?
- In which ways were the 4-year-old programs integrated in the schools? How well did the 4-year-old programs become part of the school culture?
- Were human resources (teaching assistants, ELL and special education teachers) adequate for teachers' classroom needs?
- What changes were observed in the children?
- Did children continue to attend Kindergarten at the same school?
- How did parents and teachers communicate with each other?

The evaluation consists of four parts:

1. Analysis of Work Sampling assessment: Early Kindergarten teachers used the Work Sampling assessment checklists to assess children's progress in the development of skills and behavior that have been determined to be essential for school readiness. These include socialization and personal development, language and literacy, and mathematical thinking. Teachers recorded their observations of children as reliably demonstrating the indicator, intermittently demonstrating the indicator, or do not demonstrate the indicator.
2. Tracking of children through Kindergarten enrollment: Kindergarten enrollment in Saint Paul Public Schools was reviewed to determine the percentage of children in Early K who had continued to attend the same schools.
3. Parent Opinions: A parent survey was sent out by teachers in May. Parents were asked to offer their opinions on programming, and their overall satisfaction of their child's experience.
4. Teachers' Opinions: A focus group discussion was held with teachers to document their experience of Early K, and recommendations for future 4-year-old programs.

Demographics of Children in Early Kindergarten

Distribution of the demographics of children in the eleven schools is shown in Tables 1 – 2 in Appendix A. There is a large variation in the distribution of race across these schools. For example, Caucasian children average 30% of all children, as high as 81% of the children at Randolph Heights, and as low as 5% at American Indian/Mounds Park. African American children account for 32% of all children, as high as 78% of the students at Maxfield, and 8% at Randolph Heights. Children eligible for free and reduced lunch account for 48% of all students, varying from 19% (Highland Park) to 80% (American Indian/Mounds Park). English Language Learners account for an average of

29% of all children with as few as 8% of students (Randolph Heights) and as many as 54.5% (Farnsworth).

Seventeen per cent of children attended for less than 6 months, either by starting late or leaving early. This is an indication of the mobility of students and the stability of the classrooms. (Note that in the table below, the data for children who have attended for less than 6 months will include children who are replacing those who have dropped out early.) Analysis (chi square test, accepting probabilities less than .05) of different rate of drop out by demographic characteristics reveals the following:

- no difference in gender;
- higher percentage of children who are eligible for free or reduced lunch leave the program versus those who are not eligible (21% versus 13%);
- higher percentage of children who are NOT ELL leave the program versus those who are ELL (20% versus 10%);
- higher percentage of children who are Black or Hispanic leave the program (Asian American: 9%; Hispanic: 22%; Black: 28%; Caucasian: 9%).

	Percent of Children who attended less than 6 months	Percent of Children who dropped out early
American Indian/Mounds Park	0	0
Highland Park	4%	4%
Randolph Heights	4%	4%
World Cultures	5%	6%
Four Seasons	9%	10%
Farnsworth	16%	15%
Maxfield	16%	18%
Hayden Heights	17%	21%
Longfellow	17%	18%
Eastern Heights	23%	26%
Dayton's Bluff	47%	45%
Average Across Schools	17%	17%

The most common reasons for drop out (Campus database categories) are as follows: moved out of the District or out of state (36%), unknown (29%), or withdrawn (29%). The highest drop out rate is at Dayton's Bluff. While Maxfield has a similar proportion of Black and Hispanic children, Dayton's Bluff has a considerably higher proportion of children who drop out early.

It is likely that the EK at Dayton's Bluff is following the same trend as the rest of the school. Dayton's Bluff had the lowest stability index among all public elementary schools in Saint Paul in the 2003-04 school year. The stability index is based on the number of children who were enrolled on October 1st, and attended for at least 160 days. Dayton's Bluff also ranks 4th on the mobility index for 2003-04. The mobility index shows the degree to which classrooms are disturbed by students who enroll and/or leave

the school during the school year. The index gives the number of occasions when students enroll after October 1, plus the number of occasions when students leave the district before June 1, as a percent of the October 1 enrollment. Thus it is very unlikely that there is anything specific about the 4-year-old classroom at Dayton's Bluff, but that high rates of drop out are related to circumstances of the community.

Work Sampling Assessment

Teachers used an authentic assessment, Work Sampling, to monitor students' progress throughout the year. The Work Sampling assessment is a standards-based observational assessment system designed to provide information about individual student's achievement and progress over time¹. Work Sampling checklists were completed on three domains: Social and Personality Development, Language and Literacy Development, and Mathematical Thinking. The indicators are standards in the sense that they represent what children should know and be able to do at the end of the year before entering Kindergarten, based on widely held developmental expectations for 4-year-olds. The complete list of indicators is included in Table 1 of Appendix B. For each indicator within the domains, teachers rated the child's performance as follows:

- Not Yet – indicates that a child cannot demonstrate the skill or knowledge represented by a performance indicator;
- In Process – indicates that the skill or knowledge represented by a performance indicator is intermittent or emergent, and is not demonstrated consistently;
- Proficient – indicates that the skill or knowledge represented by a performance indicator is demonstrated consistently, and is firmly within the child's repertoire.

Using the teachers' checklists for all the indicators, Work Sampling scores for all children were computed² for each of the three domains and a combined total score. Figure 1 shows the change in score across all students from fall to spring. Proficiency ratings at the spring assessment ranged from 60% in the domains of Language and Literacy Development and Mathematical Thinking, to 69% in Social and Personality Development. Overall, total scores can be interpreted as follows: By the end of the year, 62% of students were proficient, and 35% of students were well on their way to becoming proficient. Only 3% or 6 children were rated by teachers as "not yet" ready for Kindergarten.

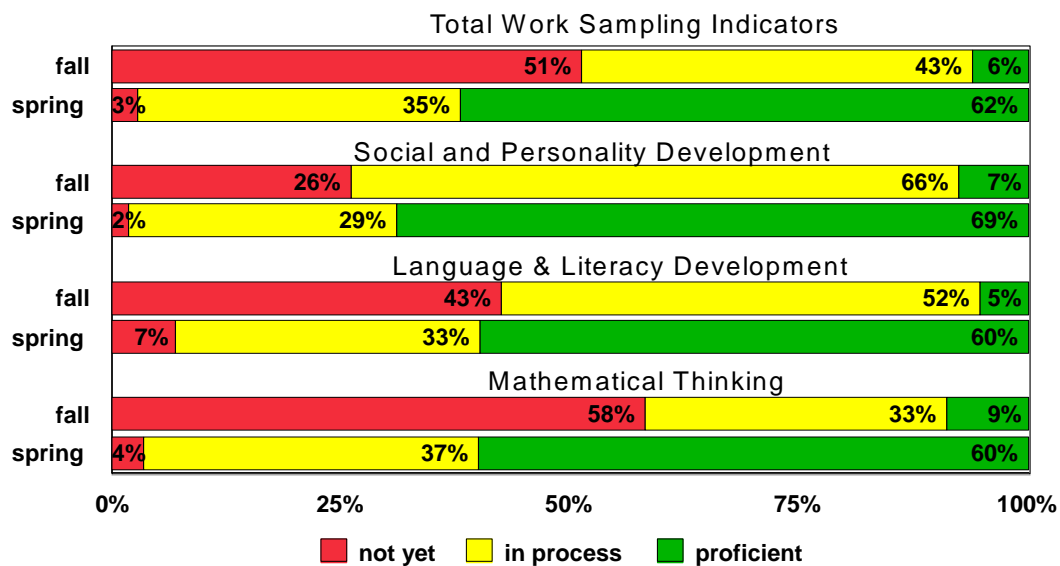
Few children are rated as proficient in fall on any of the domains, and the least developed domain is Mathematical Thinking. Children show tremendous growth across the

¹ Dichtelmiller, M.L., Jablon, J.R., Dorfman, A.B., Marsen, D.B. & Meisels, S.J. (2001). *Work Sampling in the Classroom: A Teacher's Manual*, Pearson Education, Inc. New York.

² Computation method: Overall means were calculated for individual domains, and for total score. Individual items are scored: 1 = not yet; 2 = in process; 3 = proficient. Proficiency ratings were calculated by recoding the means in the following manner: proficient, the checklist has no "not yet", and more "proficient" than "in process"; in process, the mean scores ranges from 2.0 – 2.5 and includes means above 2.5 if there is a "not yet" in the checklist; not yet, the mean score is below 2.0.

domains with only 2% of children rated as “not yet” in Social and Personality Development, and 4% of children rated as “not yet” in Mathematical Thinking. The highest rating of “not yet” is in Language and Literacy Development. Figure 1 below illustrates these patterns in growth across two testing periods, fall and spring.

Figure 1: Change in Work Sampling assessments from fall to spring.



Child Characteristics Affecting Work Sampling Assessments

Work Sampling Assessments do not differ across gender of child, but there are differences in children when comparisons are made on the basis of second language learners, and on free and reduced lunch eligibility. Table 2 in Appendix B shows the number of children at each level of Work Sampling as a function of their status as a second language learner. At each of the domains, there is a higher proportion of children rated as proficient if they are not a second language learner. Table 3 in Appendix B shows the number of children at each level of Work Sampling as a function of their eligibility for free and reduced price lunch. In Social and Personality Development and Language and Literacy, children who are not eligible for free and reduced price lunch are rated proficient in higher numbers than those who are eligible.

Ratings of proficiency also vary across race. The table below shows the percentages of children for each of the categories of race (American Indian was removed from this analysis because of small cell size). In each case the difference between the number of children rated proficient and those rated in process or not yet (combined to produce adequate cell size), was significant at $p < .01$ across race.

Percentage of Children Rated Proficient on Work Sampling Checklist

	Social and Personality Development	Language and Literacy	Mathematical Thinking	Total Work Sampling
Asian American	55%	37%	38%	42%
Hispanic	70%	52%	50%	57%
Black	70%	61%	61%	64%
White	82%	80%	80%	80%

Summary of Work Sampling Analysis

An interesting comparison can be made between the School Readiness and Community Kindergarten (SR/CK) programs and the Early Kindergarten (EK). SR/CK programs are able to target minority families (because of funding source) and have a considerably higher percentage of minority children in their programs than EK. The table below illustrates the main differences.

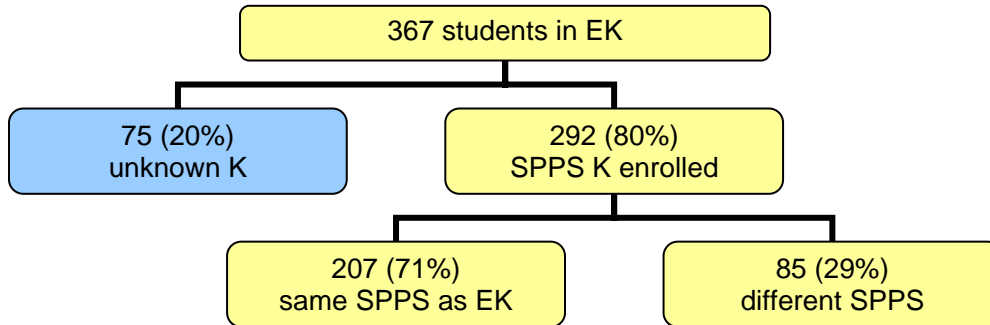
Comparison of Participants in School Readiness/Community K and Early Kindergarten Programs

	School Readiness/Community Kindergarten	Early Kindergarten
Non-minority (White)	13%	30%
English Language Learner	62%	29%
Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible	87%	48%

Children who are English Language Learners and are eligible for free and reduced price lunch are scored less proficient by teachers in EK programs, but not in SR/CK programs. No statistically significant differences are found in proficiency on Work Sampling indicators across race, language or free and reduced price lunch status in School Readiness and Community K programs (analyses conducted on SR/CK programs for 2000-04 and 2004-05). This should not be interpreted to mean that minority children do more poorly in Early Kindergarten programs than in SR/CK programs. It *does* mean that teachers rate different groups of children differently on the Work Sampling indicators. This finding could be a function of the numbers of minority children in the classroom, so that teachers in EK have a more varied sample of children for comparison. But this finding should be followed-up by tracking children into Kindergarten for an assessment of children’s school readiness, and up to higher grades to track scores on standardized tests. It may be the case that some programs are more effective at preparing certain groups for Kindergarten, but only long term follow-up can identify effectiveness and differences of school readiness programs.

Follow-up of Early Kindergarten students through Kindergarten

One goal of the Early K program was to keep children in the same school for Kindergarten. Attendance in Kindergarten was identified at the end of September 2005. Of 367 students who attended Early K, 292 or 80% stayed in District schools, while 207 or 56% stayed in the same school for Kindergarten. Another method of calculating the attendance rate is to consider only the students who remained in District schools. Thus, of the 292 students who enrolled in District schools, 207 or 71% stayed at the same school. See the figure below for clarification.



Parent Satisfaction Surveys

Parents were given a short survey towards the end of the school year. Surveys were translated into Hmong, Somali, and Spanish. One hundred and fifty parents completed the survey, a return rate of 41%. Overall, parents reported that they were pleased with the program.

- 97% of parents rated their child’s experience as either “excellent” or “very good”. Only 5 parents, 3% rated their child’s experience as “fair”.
- 97% of parents stated they were satisfied with the program; 3% (4 parents) were not satisfied.
- 92% of parents reported that there had been enough effort to involve parents; 8% (12 parents) felt there was not enough effort.

Ninety-one parents responded with written comments to the open-ended question asking for suggestions for program improvement. All parents’ comments are reproduced in Appendix C. While most of the comments expressed parent satisfaction with programming, several issues were raised repeatedly.

1. Parents stated that they wanted a more “academic” program. Children should spend more time learning alphabet and counting. Parents should have the opportunity to know what the children are learning during the day so they can reinforce this learning at home. Homework was asked for by several parents. The message from many parents was to make the program more challenging for children.

2. Parents wanted better communication from teachers. They wanted to know what was going on both in the classroom and in the school through newsletters and specific information about their child's progress towards standards.
3. Several parents wrote about concerns regarding safety, either about placing their 4-year-old on the bus, or about questions regarding transporting their child and picking them up after class.
4. In light of the newly implemented PEK grant with 4-year-old classrooms aligned with the rest of the school, it was interesting to read a few comments about the need to have the program more accepted as part of the school.

Focus Group Discussion with Teachers

A day doesn't go by that I don't think how happy I would be if these 4-year-olds would come to me in Kindergarten.

– EK Teacher who used to teach K

At the end of May, eight of the teachers came together to discuss their experience with Early K. Teachers were asked specific questions about professional development, curriculum, teaching assistants, parent involvement, and their recommendations for future 4-year-old programs. The discussion was taped and transcribed so that teachers' voices could be read here directly. The conversation between teachers was animated and honest. Teachers enjoyed the experience of talking with each other, and while some of their experiences were different, many were similar.

The teachers' comments below give a good description of their experience over the past year. In summary, teachers were disappointed with the initial lack of preparation. The professional development began late in the first semester, and they felt unclear about expectations. They expressed the need for clear standards for what their students should achieve. There are also a lot of positive feelings expressed about the year. Many of the teachers felt very confident in the program that they developed and some teachers were able to use aspects of PAE in their programs – Writers' and Readers' Workshop, and accountable talk. Above all, teachers were thrilled with the growth made by the children.

Children's Characteristics and Skills

Teachers describe 4-year-olds as children with unique skills.

- Kids at this age love to learn. They are so excited to learn something new and are so proud of themselves.
- There are so many differences between 4-year-olds and Kindergarteners; more creative, and more imaginative play.
- We need to remember that many of the students just turned 4 at the beginning of the year...they couldn't sit still at all!

- I think 75% of class knew how to write their names. In October, I took a mini-assessment of letter recognition and different things. I thought “Wow, what are we going to do with these kids in Kindergarten?”
- They like to talk and they have lots of stories to share. When [as the teacher] you have a goal in mind to accomplish, it’s difficult to work around that, but finding time to listen is really important.
- The kids like the routine and keep to the routine. If you try to change from the schedule, they’ll say, “That’s not what’s next.”
- They are really excited to be there and to learn.
- I was surprised how much they could learn. I didn’t really know what to expect because I had taught Kindergarten before. I also learned they are easy to be around, for the most part.
- It has been said that ‘young minds are like sponges’; they absorb everything they come in contact with. That really is true and is so fascinating. To see the things they have done at the beginning of the year, looking at their portfolios. Just in their name writing: I see a child having such a hard time in the beginning writing a particular letter like ‘M’ and seeing how beautifully she can do it now. I just love it!
- They tell you what’s wrong. Their honesty is awesome.
- Their forgiveness is wonderful. They can be mad and angry one minute and they take care of whatever was bothering them and they don’t hold onto it. We have to nurture that part.
- They are really learning to speak with each other. One girl said to me, “My dog died Miss Volpe”, and another student said to her, “Well, my grandma died”. And they said, “Gee, do you think they’re in the same place?” They know the way we talk to each other, so they learn to talk to each other in similar ways.
- It is so exciting, seeing kids who didn’t speak English when they started and are now speaking English.
- They learn to be risk takers. They are not afraid to ask questions. We have student inquiry as a bulk of our program; the questions they come up with, or the answers they really want, come from themselves. It’s really surprising to the kids when their friends give them the answers. They’ll ask a question “*How does this work?*” and their neighbor will answer them and they’ll say “*Oh my gosh, are you kidding!*” They learn so much from each other.

Instructional Practices

Teachers initially had some difficulty identifying appropriate instructional practices, but they learned what was most effective for the 4-year-olds.

- I still call it playtime; the parents don’t think they are learning, just playing. I think it’s more language and socializing. It’s the first opportunity for children to be with other kids to share toys, manage, negotiate and talk through things. There is a lot of growth; we were embedding, exploring, getting along. Those things that are little to us are huge to them, so we learn to work through that, without

squashing their spirit, but validate and acknowledge how they're feeling and what they are going through.

- Problem solving was a big thing we were working on. Using their words. Many haven't been in daycare or are only children. One thing that we are still having trouble with is that "*You can be friends with more than one person at a time*". That's hard for them for them to understand.
- They have strong personalities; they explore the activities that I have in place for them; I try to get them to think and they are doing that. It's not just playtime, it's learning - it's exploration.
- Repetition, rhymes, singing songs, a lot of active movement and active play.
- At the beginning of the year, we really worked on manners and using words; some kids still had tantrums. For some of them, this was their first school, never been in daycare or they are only children. It was weird for them being in a room with 20 other kids. So we talked about using words instead of crying, hitting or physical use. It took them a while, and now THEY use words, such as, "*I don't like it when you are not using words*". My aide and I are so proud to see this change.
- I had the children draw pictures about a story and then compare them with the pictures of the same story they drew six month ago; they could tell exactly what they had done the first time. It was meaningful for them – and it is a way to gain literacy.
- We did a Writers' Workshop, a little bit more modified than what I did previously [in K]. The sharing piece worked very well; they learn from each other and they get ideas from each other as they see what others can do. They are growing the skills they have.
- We had meaningful lessons for the kids. I like the routines of Writers' Workshop. The mini-lesson!...my kids just ate them up! Here's an example: I love to use post it notes. I would stick post it notes everywhere and one day it generated a discussion,

[C] "What is that? Why are you doing that?"

[T] "Well, you tell me, why would I do this?"

[C] "To remember things."

[T] "Why do you think?"

[C] "Because you forget a lot."

We did this whole mini-lesson on the use of post-its.

[C] "My dad uses post-its."

[T] "What does he use them for?"

[C] "I don't know?"

[T] "How do you think you could find out?"

[C] "I guess I could ask."

He came back the next day and said "My dad uses post-it notes for lists". We then had a mini-lesson on lists.

- They like to take work home with them. They like to see their work posted and see each others' work. They like to look at it. They like to see their own and look at each others' work.

- Some of the kids create their own portfolios, saying this is for work sampling and this is for home.
- Some of the Kindergarten teachers who have seen us in the halls, starting up in fall with 20-25 kids, and now see them in the halls and how much less time we have to spend on the organizational stuff like getting the kids to use their words, and walking in line. This is less time that Kindergarten teachers will have to spend on this stuff.
- Socialization skills are a major part of the Early K program.
- I went through Writers' Workshop last year but got kind of lost [trying to interpret it for Early K]. Then I realized that some of them can do the folder thing, the notebook. The children have such inquiring minds - they want to learn! I said to them, "Now we are going to write". One kid said, "I can't write." "Yes, you can; can you draw a picture? That's writing; you can tell a story." It really tied into where I was at Writers' Workshop.
- I know the children are learning when they are actively engaged, and when you don't have to redirect all the time, and when they want to do something over again.
- Sometimes parents tell you [that their child is learning in class]. [Child's name] was trying to write his name today at home. He was talking on and on about the story. You know they were learning if it was important enough to be spoken about at home.
- One morning, one of my kids looked very sad. He went into the coat room with his coat and his dad said to me, "He has no idea what day it is today". I said "Oh, we'll cover that today." The father said "No, no, it's because you didn't do it yesterday." I had not been in class the previous day and they had missed doing calendar and now this child was just completely lost. So we did calendar and he shouted out "I think today is this day!" He was happy!

Curriculum

None of the classrooms had an assigned curriculum and all teachers reported that they didn't want a curriculum. Many of them used Every Day Mathematics for Pre-K but resources were slow in coming together at first. All of the teachers reported that they would have liked clear standards to help them with both short and long term goals. For several of the teachers, Work Sampling provided a good set of standards.

- I had no help with any curriculum materials; I had to wing it.
- People kept coming to my room and giving me some left over bits and pieces; I got 10 rubrics cubes, and a couple wooden blocks. Some people went to rummage sales to buy things for the program.
- We are an America's Choice school and they had me going to workshops, but America's Choice doesn't have anything specific for Pre-K.
- I would like something like a framework, a sequence, what the expectations are at the end of Early K.
- I don't know if I want a whole curriculum because I enjoy being creative in my teaching and feel I am a better teacher when I am creative. I would like

- guidelines to know what I should/need to be teaching. So I know I was doing the right things.
- What is the idea that SPPS has for Early K, what did they want from us? If they do have an idea what they want, then they should tell us.
 - Everyday Math and Readers' Workshop was very adaptable to 4-year-olds.
 - I really liked the Pre-K version of Everyday Math. It was very hands on and got them moving; but the part that I found hardest was the turn-taking. All the kids wanted to go up at once. Now today we are doing memory and concentration. It gets the kids more involved.
 - Number recognition, days of week, patterns, they're exposed to the months.
 - I do two centers in Everyday Math. That's how I get my math in.
 - We do a lot with our calendar in Everyday Math and get a sense of using something in that for every day. We mark it with something that is going on in their lives, mark the calendar, and make their own calendars; crossing off days, birthdays, etc.
 - In general, I make sure all areas are covered for Work Sampling, using that throughout our day to guide the activities.
 - The Work Sampling guidelines are helpful so I knew what I was working towards. It helped me keep my vision.
 - I really liked keeping the Work Sampling Portfolio to see the progress being made, and used it during conferencing.
 - Work Sampling helped me to know what to focus on. It gave you an idea what to expect 4-year-olds to do in literacy, math or social studies.
 - I use Work Sampling in my lesson plans to guide me and observe what I am doing.
 - They're getting from you what they may not be getting at home. They're getting the broad oral language experience - things that will make them a much more ready Kindergartener. When I look at some of my Kindergarteners I think that they would have been a good candidate for the Early K program. Because they would be ready to learn and absorb instead of being a Kindergartener learning preschool. The 4-year old program is good because kids don't spend Kindergarten being in 'preschool'. I think we're getting pressure from first grade teachers and the District that we are supposed to send them up to know all their letters and numbers (from one of the Expo teachers who has both 4s and 5s in her classroom).

Teachers' Connection to Schools

Some teachers felt a real part of the culture of the school, while others felt very separate. The teachers expressed the need to have more contact with other teachers at the school.

- They have no idea that we exist, really. I don't go to prep or walk in the halls, just go to computer lab once a week. We're self-contained in our classroom and the rest of the school forgets you're there.
- I felt pretty included in our school. The hard part is going to staff meetings or staff development as there's not much that is geared toward the program for 4-

year-olds. How much is? Maybe 5% is about early K. I want to hear what they are doing and what's going on. They are very excited about the program; we have prep with the media specialist, ELL/EA comes in a few times a week. I think a lot of people know what's going on in our room and are really excited about it. I was on a team with 6-7 teachers last year (before Early K), and I really miss having other people to bounce ideas off. My TA is wonderful and she has a lot of experience. I am supposed to be part of the Kindergarten team but my prep isn't the same as theirs and my lunch isn't the same as theirs.

- Being new to Minnesota, new to school, and new to this program...it's been lonely. I've had to give people at school reminders in a nice way. We meet in the library, the EA walks with kids from breakfast, 30 minutes a few times a week. They have programs going on that we could be involved but I have to ask. They are always surprised we want to be involved.
- We felt very included. Our school had a lot of unique events for parents, and we were able to get some of our families to attend.
- We are invited to all-school assemblies, and if they are appropriate or short enough and I can manage, then I'll take them.
- I had planned on having prep and lunchtime with other teachers but it didn't work out. That was the toughest part for me. I go up to the teachers' lounge and the administration is there, but I would like the teacher/teacher interaction.

Connections to Specific Parts of School

Teachers worked at making connections with other specific areas of the school.

- I have five 6th grade buddies who rode the bus with my 4s in the morning and brought them to class. Then 4th graders pick up the afternoon 4s and take them to the bus.
- We have 2nd grade buddies that come to read once a week (half stay in our room and half go to the second grade room)
- One of the second grade teachers said she had two gifted kids that needed something to do. They would come up and help our kids unzip and undress 10 minutes before school and 10 minutes after school lets out. That was a big help in the beginning. Now they are all able to do it themselves.
- I have sixth grade reading buddies every Friday morning.

Suggestions for Connecting to School

The teachers had many suggestions for how the Early K program could become more a part of the school.

- Same lunch time with Kindergarten teachers.
- Same prep time with Kindergarten teachers.
- Full day with kids; 2 ½ hours isn't enough.
- Sharing with children between Pre-K and Kindergarten, reading time, stories.
- Visits with principal once a month to talk about program, celebrations, etc.

- Common prep time, early ed, special ed, community based programs.
- Go out of our way to integrate with school, reading buddies.
- I requested a social worker and it helped to have her know what was going on in my room. She takes out 5 children to do 'friendship' group, when they are having trouble with friendships and sharing.
- Meet with Kindergarten teachers and go over themes and other activities that may overlap so that we can support each other.
- Have Principal (and others in school administration) come to visit once a month and read a book to the class.

Assistants

Teachers felt that the EA/TA could be very effective to help manage the classroom and to add to the instructional quality. There were some complaints about assistants who were really inadequate, but for the most part, the assistants were helpful.

- My teaching assistant works well with children. She was very kind in that she followed my lead at first and let me set the tone. I'm very fortunate to have her. She's very supportive and interacts well with children and very respectful. She has taken the checklist for getting kids on busses. I don't know what I would do without her. Because if I'm bending over dealing with someone, she's the eyes for the rest of the group. She just does it. She's very professional. When the children are there she concentrates on them.
- We had good team work. We use the same language when we're working with the kids, when someone isn't sharing, etc.
- I would prefer an EA, as a TA may say 'this is not my job'.
- If it is a TA or EA their main objective is to be working with students all the time - student contact, not running copies.
- At first my aide asked me 'I'm not really sure what you are expecting?' I told her what I'm expecting and laid out the ground rules. My aide is there working with me and we share when working on plans for the next week. My aide is there to support or tell me her thoughts. She gives me input as to curriculum.
- Sometimes there has to be give on the teacher's part. Sometimes they offer ideas and if you validate what they say, and give it a try, you may be surprised. I just think it's a human thing, to validate people. The TA is an important part of the class/team.

English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education

Many of the teachers had regular visits by an ELL teacher; special education services were only mentioned by one teacher.

- I have an ELL instructor daily. She comes in for 25 minutes in the morning and 25 minutes in the afternoon. We work together as a group and she helps with group time and play time. She may pull them to do story time.

- I have 9 ELL kids and the ELL teacher comes in every day during the prep, 25 minutes, either comes in to help the prep teacher and assists and takes them out. I also have an ELL/EA who also comes in for about 30 minutes, M/W/F. Whatever we're doing, he helps us.
- My ELL teacher comes three times a week and works with my kids. My ELL students have developed by leaps and bounds and I have to hush them sometimes because they are so excited.
- I have two kids that get special education; one child gets services once a week, and the other has services twice a week. It has been very difficult to get services.

Parents' Involvement

All the teachers worked at communicating with parents. It was easy to get parents involved because as one teacher stated, "These children are still babies, at least in the eyes of their parents." Most teachers stated that they sent home a monthly or weekly newsletter.

- I have a monthly calendar; it's more visual, easier to understand if they don't understand English very well. It's important to have the parents or someone read this to the children. I tell parents about social events like the pizza night. I'll have someone in our school call Hmong parents, to tell them about a special event.
- Every Friday I write a newsletter and give it to parents. If I saw parents I would share anecdotes, and talk to them – find out how they are doing and see them during conferences.
- We went on field trips with parent volunteers. I did daily notebooks that I used to communicate with parents. If I wanted to communicate I would write something and send it home.
- We had monthly parent and child activities and some participated.
- A lot of my parents looked for the reading log. I think for the most part the newsletter was a big help in communicating with parents.
- I asked the parents to come in and share their talents, music, magic tricks, shared information about their jobs. It was great. The kids loved it. The children are so proud to have their parents come in to class.
- We had parents from the PTA help to organize room parents. They set up a volunteer schedule and whenever we needed volunteers they would come in to be 'mystery readers'. The kids would be surprised to see their parents come in. If I needed volunteers, it would be in the newsletter and they would call and volunteer. I had parents come in 3 days a week; some parents would come in for 15 minutes. So they either read or during the winter, they would help me get the kids dressed to go home in their snowsuits- that was a chore. Some parents were like "Okay, I've got an hour, tell me where you want me." It varies. It was mainly during math, reading or writing - things that were more time-consuming and I needed the help. The 'room parents' called up the other parents when needing volunteers. This was a huge help for me, and letting parents have a role in communicating to other parents.

Parents' Connection to School

Teachers' perspectives on parents continuing with the school:

- Make them feel part of the school, keep them involved in activities, make them feel part of it. Let them see the excitement in the teachers. There are a lot of siblings involved in school.
- I do think too that even though a lot of these students aren't going to Longfellow they've had an opportunity to experience Longfellow and a lot of the parents' minds are changing, saying "Oh, this isn't a bad school, this is a good school". Because they've come to our carnival and said 'Oh, this is a very homey atmosphere and so I got a lot of good feedback. Unfortunately, a lot of the students aren't staying, but as it continues it changes perceptions.
- I think it is good that a lot of the students are staying, that it has opened their eyes to this, to this program. I have a couple of the parents who are registered in the fall. The word is getting out there that public schools aren't bad.
- If you want students to stay in school beyond Pre-K, it's a greater responsibility to the school as a whole. If we want to keep them beyond Early K it is up to the parents to become acquainted with the school, to come to the programs - open houses, special events, etc. Once they feel good about a school, they have to feel better about it. The whole administration of the school needs to get involved.
- A few of the children are going to private school, some are going to the same school as sibling. I'm losing 6 kids, 2 to private school.
- I have a couple parents who were considering private schools but have seen that it is a really nice school and have now changed their minds and are sending their kids to our school. The majority of the kids will come to our elementary school. Some don't live near our school or are not in the attendance area. One child is an advanced reader and is going to another school. One mom doesn't even live in the area and liked the program and is now bringing that child back to our school.
- I gave a survey to parent - 75% are coming back to our school.
- The ultimate decision for most parents is that they had siblings at other schools. My parents would say "It is completely self-serving for me, but I've done two pick-ups for X number of years".

Professional Development

Teachers had mixed feelings about the professional development. Some felt that it was very helpful but needed to be augmented. Others felt that it was too theoretical and they needed more assistance with planning day-to-day classroom activities. All of them stated that it was given much too late. Teachers felt that they could really benefit from spending more time with each other. Even during the focus group discussion there were a few times when teachers moved into a sharing of ideas of what worked in their classroom and sharing some specific issues they had not been able to deal with. Teachers wanted more contact with teachers in their schools, but they also wanted regular contact with other 4-year-old teachers so they could share effective teaching strategies.

- I thought they [professional development leaders] were going to give us guidelines and state what outcomes they wanted for Pre-K by the end of the year, but it was more abstract. It was more, how it was done in school readiness instead of how we do it with more children in our classrooms. There was really nothing specific to it: it was more philosophy, approaches. I appreciated that, but need more.
- I liked hearing that other people believe what I think and believe to be true. There wasn't a connection to what is going on in the classroom, so I didn't find it useful of my time.
- You didn't get the concrete stuff to use, to try. It was a way to get some ideas and get some background in early childhood theory but we didn't get some practical applications. It validated what you feel 4-year olds are doing.
- I really liked the workshops – they were very helpful, but the time was so short. There was so much valuable information and I would have liked to have more discussions about it with the rest of us to see how we are incorporating that. I think [what was discussed in the workshop] is a very big factor in the part of classroom success. I just didn't think I had enough time to digest it.
- I needed to just sit down, talk about, what is your schedule, how are you fitting in colors, or whatever, how did you teach.
- There's a lack of presenters who have taught early childhood who are very knowledgeable and that know about Readers' and Writers' Workshop. There's got to be someone out there. It's really difficult for us to sit through something that is geared for 6th grade or more. It would be nice to have something geared toward Pre-K or Early K.
- Even the summer institute needs to have a component for 4-year-olds. I looked at that [as a professional development opportunity] and didn't even want to go to that.
- I think next year we need to work really hard to get together once a month, bring ideas, share ideas, and get together. I always learn more from my colleagues.
- Maybe we could even work as a group of teachers next year, on a 4-year-old curriculum because the District doesn't provide it for us.
- It would help to have a 10-month plan as to what we should and could be doing. The Kindergarten teachers have this. Their prep time is different than ours. We could be talking or mixing curriculum in Early K and Kindergarten.
- It would be helpful for all of the Early K teachers to get together quarterly.
- In August, it would be good to get four topics that we could talk about during the year, and we could get a consultant that could talk to us about this, and share our experiences. If we had the opportunity to talk about or have somebody who had experience in that topic area. We all have different experiences and that is just helpful.
- I would really like to do a book study. Part of this as Readers' and Writers' Workshop, study and take a text, read it, come together and discuss it.

Teachers' Concerns

- There seems to be no funding for subs for the TAs. This TA that I have, it's his first year working with young children and I think he's caught every virus that's been going around and has been quite sick. It was very hard in the beginning of the school year, and now he's leaving for a summer job on June 1st. We won't have a TA for 2 weeks at the end of the school year.
- We have to have numbers that are manageable. Even the standards according to the National Association for Young Children has a preschool ratio of 1:10. If we want quality we want to have numbers that are manageable, less than 25 kids to be effective. The research backs that up.
- Trying to do Work Sampling checklists and during conferences, 25 kids gets to be a lot. The School Readiness ratio is 1:17. It gets heavy and pretty stressful at conference time if you are conferencing 40+ children. If we are really going to do what the District wants us to do, to help prepare children for Kindergarten in all areas, the numbers need to be less.

Final Comments

During conferences I had parents concerned about their children being able to move on. During my first conference, they were very concerned if their children were doing well, but they didn't bring their children to conferences, even though I welcomed and encouraged that. They had concerned looks on their faces. The second conference, they said "We're so excited you have no idea!" and pulled out pictures and papers and writing. They are so thankful for this program!

I have some students who didn't speak any English at all when they came - Spanish, Hmong and Chinese. They are now carrying on conversations with each other. It'll be so much easier for them to follow the Kindergarten curriculum knowing this and how to follow directions.

I asked the kids, "What do they want in a teacher?" The kids said "She needs to be fun, she needs to smile a lot. And she can't pinch cheeks!" Because one of my kids said that one of her aunts does that and she said "I tell you Miss Volpe, it hurts". When I asked what they wanted in a teacher's aide, the kids said, "We want someone who helps us, who doesn't yell at us and makes us feel happy." "My brother tells me I'm stupid and I don't want you to do that". My aide said "Well, does Miss Volpe make you feel that way?" "Oh no, she's fun". The same girl who told me not to pinch her cheeks told the aide, "That Miss Volpe hugs just right."

I love this job, it is such a happy job. I have never laughed so much.

Appendix A

Table 1: 2004-2005 Early Kindergarten Program Student Demographics - Race

All children who were registered are included, late entry, early drop out, and children who attended all year.

School	Total	American Indian	Asian American	Hispanic American	African American	Caucasian
Total EK	367	12 (3%)	82 (22%)	47 (13%)	117 (32%)	109 (30%)
Dayton's Bluff	57	3 (5%)	6 (11%)	11 (19%)	30 (53%)	7 (12%)
Eastern Heights	26		5 (19%)	4 (15%)	7 (27%)	10 (39%)
Farnsworth	44		25 (57%)	5 (11%)	6 (14%)	8 (18%)
Four Seasons	43	1 (2%)	6 (14%)	9 (21%)	15 (35%)	12 (28%)
Hayden Heights	24		8 (33%)	4 (17%)	3 (12.5%)	9 (37.5%)
Highland Park	45	1 (2%)	7 (16%)	3 (7%)	5 (11%)	29 (64%)
Longfellow	18		3 (17%)	2 (11%)	8 (44%)	5 (28%)
Maxfield	45		5 (11%)	1 (2%)	35 (78%)	4 (9%)
World Cultures	19		10 (53%)	4 (21%)	2 (10%)	3 (16%)
Randolph Heights	26			3 (11%)	2 (8%)	21 (81%)
American Indian/Mounds Park	20	7 (35%)	7 (35%)	1 (5%)	4 (20%)	1 (5%)

Table 2: 2004-2005 Early Kindergarten Program Student Demographics – Eligibility for Free/Reduced Lunch and English Language Learners

School	Eligible free/reduced lunch	Not Eligible free/reduced lunch		ELL	Not ELL
Total EK	176 (48%)	191 (52%)		107 (29%)	260 (71%)
Dayton’s Bluff	44 (77%)	13 (23%)		14 (25%)	43 (75%)
Eastern Heights	16 (61.5%)	10 (38.5%)		7 (27%)	19 (73%)
Farnsworth	20 (45.5%)	24 (54.5%)		24 (54.5%)	20 (45.5%)
Four Seasons	10 (23%)	33 (77%)		11 (26%)	32 (74%)
Hayden Heights	9 (37.5%)	15 (62.5%)		10 (42%)	14 (58%)
Highland Park	8 (18%)	37 (82%)		7 (16%)	38 (84%)
Longfellow	8 (44%)	10 (56%)		5 (28%)	13 (72%)
Maxfield	31 (69%)	14 (31%)		8 (18%)	37 (82%)
World Cultures	8 (42%)	11 (58%)		12 (63%)	7 (37%)
Randolph Heights	6 (23%)	20 (77%)		2 (8%)	24 (92%)
American Indian/Mounds Park	16 (80%)	4 (20%)		7 (35%)	13 (65%)

Appendix B

Table 1

Work Sampling System Developmental Checklist®

I Personal and Social Development

- A Self concept
 - 1. Demonstrates self-confidence.
 - 2. Shows some self-direction.
- B Self control
 - 1. Follows simple classroom rules and routines.
 - 2. Uses classroom materials carefully.
 - 3. Manages transitions.
- C Approaches to Learning
 - 1. Shows eagerness and curiosity as a learner.
 - 2. Attends to tasks and seeks help when encountering a problem
 - 3. Approaches tasks with flexibility and inventiveness.
- D Interaction with others
 - 1. Interacts easily with one or more children.
 - 2. Interacts easily with familiar adults.
 - 3. Participates in the group life of the class.
 - 4. Shows empathy and caring for others.
- E Social problem-solving
 - 1. Seeks adult help when needed to resolve conflicts.

II Language and Literacy

- A Listening
 - 1. Gains meaning by listening.
 - 2. Follows two- or three-step directions.
 - 3. Demonstrates phonological awareness.
- B Speaking
 - 1. Speaks clearly enough to be understood without contextual clues.
 - 2. Uses expanded vocabulary and language for a variety of purposes.

- C Reading
 - 1. Shows appreciation for books and reading.
 - 2. Shows beginning understanding of concepts about print.
 - 3. Begins to develop knowledge about letters.
 - 4. Comprehends and responds to stories read aloud.
- D Writing
 - 1. Represents ideas and stories through pictures, dictation, and play.
 - 2. Uses letter-like shapes, symbols, and letters to convey meaning.

III Mathematical Thinking

- A Mathematical processes
 - 1. Begins to use simple strategies to solve mathematical problems.
- B Number and operations
 - 1. Shows beginning understanding of number and quantity.
- C Patterns, relationships, and functions
 - 1. Sorts objects into subgroups that vary by one or two attributes.
 - 2. Recognizes simple patterns and duplicates them.
- D Geometry and spatial relations
 - 1. Begins to recognize and describe the attributes of shapes.
 - 2. Shows understanding of and uses several positional words.
- E Measurement
 - 1. Orders, compares, and describes objects according to a single attribute.
 - 2. Participates in measuring activities.

Table 2: Comparison of Work Sampling Assessment – Children who are English Language Learners and those who are not.

	Second Language Learner	Not yet	In process	Proficient
Total Work Sampling Indicators***	ELL (N=78)	7 (9%)	38 (49%)	33 (42%)
	Not ELL (N=134)	2 (1%)	37 (28%)	95 (71%)
Social and Personality Development**	ELL (N=78)	2 (3%)	31 (40%)	45 (58%)
	Not ELL (N=134)	3 (2%)	33 (25%)	98 (73%)
Language and Literacy***	ELL (N=76)	15 (20%)	33 (43%)	28 (37%)
	Not ELL (N=133)	2 (1%)	38 (29%)	93 (70%)
Mathematical Thinking***	ELL (N=76)	9 (12%)	39 (51%)	28 (37%)
	Not ELL (N=134)	1 (1%)	39 (29%)	94 (70%)

* Differences are not significantly different.

** Differences are statistically significant, $p < .05$

*** Differences are statistically significant, $p < .001$

Table 3: Comparison of Work Sampling Assessment – Children eligible for free or reduced lunch and those not eligible.

	Free or Reduced Price Lunch	Not yet	In process	Proficient
Total Work Sampling Indicators**	Eligible (N=89)	4 (4.5%)	40 (45%)	45 (51%)
	Not eligible (N=123)	5 (4%)	35 (28.5%)	83 (67.5%)
Social and Personality Development**	Eligible (N=89)	2 (2%)	35 (39%)	52 (59%)
	Not eligible (N=123)	3 (2%)	29 (24%)	91 (74%)
Language and Literacy**	Eligible (N=86)	9 (10.5%)	37 (43%)	40 (46.5%)
	Not eligible (N=123)	8 (6%)	34 (28%)	81 (66%)
Mathematical Thinking*	Eligible (N=86)	6 (7%)	37 (42%)	45 (51%)
	Not eligible (N=122)	4 (3%)	41 (34%)	77 (63%)

* Differences are not significantly different.

** Differences are statistically significant, $p < .05$

*** Differences are statistically significant, $p < .001$

Appendix C

Parent surveys were completed by 150 parents at the end of the school year. Of these, 91 parents responded to the open-ended question at the end of the survey:

“What suggestions do you have for improving the Early Kindergarten Program?”

Each of the bullets is a different parent’s response and is written here in the same manner written by parents on the survey.

- I am very happy that you have the way or program to help my child to move on to next step. I am very happy. (Hmong - translation)
- None – the program seemed to go very well except that I feel more precautions should be taken in the way of busing and having someone watching the kids from the time they get off the bus until class starts. I also had some concerns about bus drivers whom I had to give directions to because they had no clue of the area. This would frighten me if I were a child. Thank you!
- Sending weekly reports home to parents, letting us know what to help our kids with.
- More communication, details of the week
- None – your teachers are great, thank you so much. I was very pleased.
- I really like this program and feel it needs to continue. My child has grown so much within one year. I encourage more reading and singing. Art activities are also very fun and give time for them to be creative.
- It is a great program for all the children. It helps them get ready for kindergarten and it is a good start. I am very pleased with the principles of the class. Thanks a lot, it is a great program. (Spanish – translation)
- No changes – very excellent program
- Make it a little more challenging for students who are somewhat advanced. We felt the class taught to the lowest common denominator; the result was simply free daycare (and inferior in terms of curriculum to the paid daycare she attended after school.)
- None – everything is good.
- Thank you for everything you have taught my son. The program is wonderful. I hope it will continue for other children to benefit from.

- None – it was wonderful for my son
- Teach more of the ABC's and 123's
- I think it would be ideal to have a longer day. (Child) enjoyed this program a lot. He loves school. He always says, "My teacher says..."
- (Child) has improved a lot. I am glad he had two good teachers to help him.
- Teach more ABC's and 123's
- When it comes to my child's experience with kindergarten, I suggest to change nothing. The teaching staff was wonderful and the classroom provides an excellent opportunity for children to learn through play. Thank you for a wonderful and exciting year.
- More correspondence with school and home
- For my part and that of my daughter, one suggestion I have is to read and write more in English. (Spanish – translation)
- More parent involvement
- I think that this program is great! I am very pleased with the teachers, curriculum and standards. I hope that this program stays, along with its teachers. It is a wonderful asset! Thank you all!
- No snack at school due to the ½ day program and they eat lunch shortly after arriving at their homes.
- I liked the weekly newsletter, but would also appreciate a month ahead schedule. That way parents can plan ahead for helping out or gathering materials for school.
- Our only difficulties were in getting him to and from school (not far enough away to use the bus.)
- We have had a wonderful experience. Our son has grown in so many ways!
- Keep it going! It's a wonderful program! It has been so much better than my older child's experience in nursery school! My child is so much more prepared and excited about kindergarten!
- More help for the teachers, and needs work on who can pick up your child and who can not.

- I am as mother I am happy and thank you for everything the teachers help my child in the way I want. Thanks again. (Hmong - translation)
- I think the whole early kindergarten program was great. I think it starts with the teacher and you all made a wonderful choice in Mrs. Gill.
- More teachers like Mrs. Gill
- Change it from being a half-day to full-day program. Although it may seem a lot, some children can handle being in school all day at the age of four. I believe it will give them a “jumpstart” on their education.
- I think everything about the program was excellent. Ms. Gill did an outstanding job with my child. It’s unfortunate that the next set of 4 yr. olds won’t have the pleasure of learning from such a gifted person. I’m 100% sure that this program has made a significant impact on my child’s education in a positive way. Ms. Gill...we all appreciate you!
- My suggestion for the early kindergarten will help them to prepare for kindergarten and get ready.
- I think if she go to early kindergarten she will be very smart.
- None – I think it is a very good program.
- I believe the early kindergarten program has changed my son a lot for a better future. (So more grace to your elbows)? Thanks.
- Nothing – I’m glad he came school at Maxfield and Ms. Gill was him teacher and she have done more and Ms. Penny have got (child) to open more and very proper talking and I thank you both for improve and working with (child) on all areas that he was having more difficult with and even he still, but he have got better at it and thanks to all who help him and better working with him with ___?___ area.
- More field trips outside or walking.
- You did a very good job. (Hmong - translation)
- Nothing – only to thank the teacher.
- I think the teacher(s) of early kindergarten should send activities home with students that would coincide with what they learned for the week. Other than that, my daughter has shown great enthusiasm to learn and has matured in her behavior. She is always bragging about her teachers and what she has learned. Thank you.

- Mary, you rock!
- Have it all day instead of half day because they feel different from the other kindergartners. Easier transition time and situations.
- None – program is just fine. A fantastic year for our daughter and our profound appreciation for the teachers.
- We are thrilled with the program. Thank you!
- I could do more [parent involvement] but could be given more opportunities to participate.
- The bus has been a challenge all year. It takes a lot of trust to put a four year old on the bus.
- Keep up with the great job that is being done. Thank you for everything!
- I'm not sure. All I know is that my child really improved in her self esteem. She was deadly shy, but got more comfortable as the year went on. Thank you!
- Keep the funding for the program.
- Our biggest disappointment is that our late summer birthday son isn't fully ready to start kindergarten and we were hoping to retain him in a 4 year old program, but we were told we couldn't (by SPPS). He has received so much, but as the youngest in his class, he is still behind socially and in writing and drawing/pictures (i.e. "a flower".) I understand funding wise why he cannot repeat, but it also doesn't fully support him as a student to have him go on to kindergarten and then repeat kindergarten. Also, we really liked Four Seasons, but I found the school and the PTO at a loss for being able to include the 4 year olds in the larger scheme of the school. Laura Saatzar has been an excellent teacher for our 4 year old and she does a great job with the kids.
- This program is wonderful. All of these kids will have a huge jump on learning and how school works. Ms. Swift, Ms. Kristen and Ms. Kathy Sawyer made this warm non-threatening environment and helped all the kids with the transition to school. The time frame was perfect for this age. I know the kids could maybe learn more, but then what would they have left to learn in kindergarten? Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!
- Newsletters should give parents more information what is happening in the classroom so we can reinforce new concepts at home. Time should be taken to create report cards specific to each child vs just a general blanket comment that

pertains to the class as a whole. We are interested in how our child is performing/learning each standard or goal.

- This program was perfect for my child, especially with her Sept. birthday. We were extremely impressed with the program and with the gains our child made. Eliminate some of the eating – no breakfast time or no snack time during class time.
- Don't change a thing!
- A smaller class size would be beneficial but we have no complaints about (child's) experience in pre-K. It has been a wonderful introduction to Randolph Heights for him and Mrs. Smith and all the staff have been great. Thank you so much for offering it this year! His reading ability amazes me. I know pre-k has helped with that too, even though it is not a goal for pre-k.
- Excellent job! Thank you.
- I know some of the kids wanted to put on a play for their parents. Maybe making/holding simple props and singing songs could have sufficed and would have gotten the parents together to get to know one another. Overall, this year was great! It was a chance for the kids to learn the basics of school so that next year they can focus on learning and not how to find the bathroom, their classroom, etc. This year really helped boost confidence for the kids. Thanks for conducting the program!
- This was our first year in grade school. Mrs. Swift's enthusiasm and genuine interest in the kids is a huge asset to Randolph Heights and the primary reason we are returning.
- No suggestions – the program was excellent. Susan Swift is a fabulous teacher – the best I've encountered. She is warm, energetic, understanding, organized....amazing!
- We were very happy with the program. He really liked showing us that he knows his letters. The phonics/animal program was a hit.
- Maybe one more visit to the classroom before school starts. I think the program was excellent in building confidence, social skills and remarkable academic progress.
- Have the pick-up routine set for parents with a consistent time. 12:30 at the front office worked great for us. Let them know they can park right out front to walk up and get them. He was sitting on the bench in the office waiting! Great program!! Just what we needed to get ready. Kindergarten is going to be a fun and exciting

year! We were concerned about (child) being ready as a young kindergartner, but your program far exceeded our expectations! Thanks.

- The program went as well as I expected. The children very much enjoyed getting to know each other.
- More activities to take home for homework and encourage parents to be more involved with children at school.
- None – I think the program was a good as could be expected. Thanks.
- Early kindergarten program mostly improve everything that I expected for my child.
- I would like more projects for both parents and child. Being a part of their homework shows them that we care and they love sharing with parents. It encourages them to learn more.
- Persistent in preparing them to the next level in writing, math and science. From playing to teaching. Observe safety nets.
- I think that the early kindergartner should be included in more activities at the school. Sometimes I did not think the parents were as informed as they should have been i.e. when that teacher was arrested, the other students received letters 3 days before my son did.
- I would like to see a more advanced schedule of things coming up to be more prepared at home. I would like to see more projects come home. I was very pleased with the teaching staff!
- I know the year started out quick for all of us with this new program. My suggestions are: 1) pre-K handbook; 2) expectations of parents/child, & 3) expectations of teacher
- A more rigorous curriculum would be advantageous. I think that the program was good for kids to learn how school worked (how to be with others, listen, follow directions, etc.) but the curriculum (reading, letters, math, etc.) was lagging.
- I would put 4 year K in all schools as a ½ day option and make regular K classes all full day in St. Paul. It is clear that the children who participated benefited hugely from this program. It should be available to all St. Paul children – they are so much more prepared for K next year.
- Seemed to better prepare my son for Kindergarten than did private pre-school.
- I was very happy with the program.

- Continuing it!!
- The teachers have done and are doing a great job. Thank you.
- Need more reading and writing.
- Switch out activities at small group time more often. Some children seemed bored of the same activities every day.
- My child joined Early Kindergarten Program only in April 2005. I think this program should be available to all 4-year old kids. It is a very good program and most of the children are eager and ready for group activity.
- Excellent – Our child loved going every day. Ms Volpe was great!
- Keep it going!
- More effort for the “only child” to interact with other students at the beginning of the year. This also applies to the shy students.
- I would have liked the school district to have funded the program for more than 1 year. How can you evaluate the benefit of such a program in such a small amount of time!
- Recess/P.E. out on the playground would have been nice.
- None – it’s a wonderful program! Great teachers. (Ms. Volpe, Mrs. Peterson)
- The program was excellent! (Child) learned much more than our other 2 kids who attended pre-school programs. I would highly recommend the 4-year-old program and Ms. Volpe. Thank you.
- It was an excellent program for my son. I am very disappointed there will not be another 4 yr program next year at Highland Park Elementary.
- We loved our experience at Highland. It was difficult for (child) to choose only 3 favorites! He really enjoyed show & tell time, also looked forward to it all week. The teachers were wonderful! Thank You!
- The teaching staff was very dedicated in this program, however – they lacked administrators who had any age/developmental expertise. The programs began over the nationally (NAEYC) recommended ratios and then administrators routinely “pulled” the T.A. for other school related duties. This left a 1st year teacher with 1:24 ratio of 4 & 5 year olds.

The lack of building level expertise meant that the 1st year teacher had no mentor or building level contact with whom to develop the program.

Philosophically, this was a “kindergarten” program for 4-year-olds, not a 4 and 5 year old program that prepared kids for Kindergarten. Teacher training for this program came late and to the best of my knowledge was not mandatory – leaving the children to the whims of the developing program and teacher. As a result, the classroom was deficient in many of the Harms & Clifford environmental assessment areas and had no one onsite to guide in its development.

In order for these isolated programs to be developmentally appropriate, the district will need both administrator as well as T.A. training (early as well as often). In addition experienced teacher-mentors (early childhood experts) and classroom environmental rating scales would have targeted areas needed for development. Are there plans for onsite consultants to “check in” and guide the development of these programs – or will they be “piled” on top of administrators already full K-6 plates? How will classrooms be using nationally validated E.C. classroom rating scales – not watering down K-12 effective practice models? How will building level administrators be held accountable for classroom ratio compliance? How will the district work to communicate the essential and philosophical differences between early childhood effective practices and the K-12 models? How will they be held accountable during the implementation process?